

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 700

By Southerland

A RESOLUTION to honor and commemorate the life of John Gilliland, Revolutionary War hero.

WHEREAS, this General Assembly takes great pleasure in paying tribute to one of the most significant figures in the history of Tennessee and the United States of America, John Gilliland, a rugged, but educated, frontiersman of Scots-Irish descent who embodied all that is good in Tennessee's cherished heritage; and

WHEREAS, a man of great honor and upstanding character, John Gilliland was one of the valiant Overmountain Men who defeated the British at the Battle of Kings Mountain and played an instrumental role in establishing both the Watauga Association and the State of Franklin; and

WHEREAS, John Gilliland was one of a hardy band of frontiersmen who left the colonies and settled in the western Appalachian Mountains in defiance of the British Crown's orders; together, they established the first true democratic government in the new world at Fort Watauga when they founded the Watauga Association; and

WHEREAS, the Watauga Association performed many essential governmental functions, including building forts and mustering militias, both of which were necessary because the British Army did not operate on the western side of the Appalachian Mountains, thus leaving the settlers with no protection; and

WHEREAS, the Revolutionary War did not directly affect the Overmountain settlers very much until a British major named Patrick Ferguson, a subordinate of General Cornwallis, was tasked with recruiting Southern men to join the British militia; and

WHEREAS, a Scot, Major Ferguson was a brave and astute commander and an effective recruiter; he amassed 1,200 men and issued a warning to the Overmountain Men to

“surrender to the King”; this ultimatum enraged the settlers, and they vowed to take the fight to Ferguson; and

WHEREAS, John Gilliland, his sons, his father-in-law, Robert Young, and his sons mustered at Fort Watauga, where they joined other Overmountain Men and fell under the command of their good friend, John Sevier; and

WHEREAS, enduring cold, rain, and hunger, these Patriots made the 263-mile journey from September 25 to October 7, 1780, over the Appalachian Mountains from Fort Watauga to Kings Mountain, South Carolina, to engage Major Patrick Ferguson and his 1,200 Loyalists; and

WHEREAS, the Patriot forces, which numbered 900 men, soon surrounded the base of the mountain; they were seasoned, rugged, brave men who were angry, eager to fight, and experienced in Cherokee warfare; and

WHEREAS, on their third push up the mountain, John Gilliland, who had been shot three times with 69-caliber musket balls, made it to the top alongside Robert Young; although badly wounded, John Gilliland took aim and fired at Major Ferguson, but his rifle misfired; he quickly called out to alert his father-in-law, and Robert Young shot Patrick Ferguson, knocking him out of his saddle; and

WHEREAS, earlier that day, Major Ferguson had declared that God Himself and all His angels couldn't get him off that mountain, and he was right; he is still there to this day, buried under a pile of rocks; and

WHEREAS, the Patriots killed or captured 1,200 Tories that day, which represented one-third of Cornwallis's army, while only twenty-eight Patriots were lost; and

WHEREAS, the victory at Kings Mountain was pivotal, as it swung momentum in favor of the Patriots, increasing the public's enthusiasm tremendously and inspiring more and more colonists to join the cause; one year and twelve days later, Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown; and

WHEREAS, John Gilliland survived his wounds and lived an honorable and productive life after his heroic service with the Overmountain Men at the Battle of Kings Mountain; he is

fondly remembered today as a beloved hero and true Patriot who fought diligently for our independence; and

WHEREAS, a generous benefactor and public servant, John Gilliland was a loving husband to his wife, Elizabeth Young, served as a member of the convention of 1785 which penned the constitution of the State of Franklin, and donated fifty acres of land for the first county seat of Cocke County; and

WHEREAS, he was also a trusted surveyor and a Cherokee interpreter; he lived a full and happy life, until he and his wife were killed by the Cherokee on their way back from Fort Wear to Newport, where they made their home; and

WHEREAS, on April 23, 2016, the General Henry Knox Chapter of the Tennessee Society of the Sons of the Revolution and the descendants of John Gilliland will participate in a memorial for John Gilliland, who is buried in the Wear Family Cemetery in Pigeon Forge; and

WHEREAS, as they gather together on this solemn, yet celebratory, occasion, we join with these distinguished citizens in commemorating the legacy of John Gilliland and reflecting upon the many ways that his independent spirit and courage live on today in East Tennessee; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that on the occasion of the service to honor his memory, we commemorate the life of John Gilliland, who fought heroically and effectively with the Overmountain Men at the Battle of Kings Mountain, a decisive victory that turned the tide of the Revolutionary War in favor of the Patriot cause.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.